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ABSTRACT

Administrative isolation involves the absence of colleagues to share problems, seek advice, offer and receive feedback, and obtain valid information regarding one's professional effectiveness. This condition of administrative isolation is exacerbated for women in administrative roles who are further isolated by their minority status. This paper describes the creation, development, and maintenance of two professional support groups of women managers. The first group was formed with the intent of developing a professional support system, and all of its members came from the same school system. The second group was convened to develop an instrument for obtaining data on administrative effectiveness; implicit in the design, however, was the formation of a professional support system. The members of the group were drawn from different school systems. Additionally, the paper describes the experience of a male group of educational leaders engaged in the development of a professional effectiveness instrument. Impressionistic comparisons are offered between the men's and women's groups. Finally, the two conditions favoring the development and maintenance of such groups are discussed. (Author/MLF)

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INCREASED EFFECTIVENESS AMONG WOMEN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATORS: TWO LOCAL EFFORTS TO COMBAT ADMINISTRATIVE ISOLATION

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ABSTRACT

Administrative isolation is an issue repeatedly identified by educational leaders. It involves the absence of a setting of colleagues in which to share problems, seek advice, offer and receive feedback, and obtain valid information regarding one's professional effectiveness. This condition of administrative isolation is exacerbated for women in administrative roles who are further isolated by their minority status.

The following paper describes the creation, development, and maintenance of two professional support groups of women managers. The first group was formed with the intent of developing a professional support system, and all of its members came from the same school system. The second group was convened to address the task of developing an instrument for obtaining reliable data on administrative effectiveness; implicit in the design, however, was the formation of a professional support system. The members of the group were drawn from different school systems.

Additionally, the paper describes the experience of a male group of educational leaders engaged in the development of a professional effectiveness instrument. Impressionistic comparisons are offered between the men's and women's groups. Finally, two conditions favoring the development and maintenance of such groups are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

> That's the thing -- I don't know how other principals function. I just know how I do. And this is something that maybe we can do -- talk about the nitty gritty of the job. I'd be fascinated to know the day to day ... what people do, and how they interact. The only way to get feedback in this job is usually through rumor or people tell you, "Now, I really shouldn't say this, but ..."

What this principal is talking about is the isolation of her job. This statement, and the experiences which inform it, are similar to those of more than 300 persons in positions of educational leadership with whom the Leadership & Learning Cooperative has worked during the past four years. This statement is especially true of women leaders who are further isolated by their minority status in most school systems. What educational leaders appear to mean by the isolation of their jobs is that to become a leader usually entails the loss of previous peer support, and inhibits the development of new peer support. For educational leaders discuss policy and philosophy, but not practice, with each other. Within this framework of ignorance about how other leaders attend to their day-to-day practice, most of the learning in-the-job comes from being alone and failing.

Educational leaders say they lack a setting of other administrators they can turn to for advice, feedback, a chance to talk through and make new sense out of often repeated experiences. They say that if they ask for help they fear it will be perceived as evidence that they do not know what they are doing and should not be in their present positions. They say that they go outside of their job for personal support; they go to friends and relatives who can often only listen sympathetically because the intricacies of the job are unfamiliar even to the friendliest outsider. They say that professional support is much needed but is rarely found within the context of their job.

The Leadership and Learning Cooperative, a project funded by the Carnegie Corporation and located at the Education Development Center in Newton, Massachusetts, has for four years attempted to respond to this and other issues of school leaders by offering an in-service program in personal growth and professional effectiveness. The focus of LLC's work is on how principals, directors, supervisors, and superintendents learn on-the-job. For the past two years, LLC has devoted time to the issues of women educational leaders in an attempt to learn more about how to encourage women to enter into administrative roles and to prosper in these roles.

Specifically, LLC has worked with women administrators in two separate efforts to break down some of the barriers of job isolation. The first involved a group of sixteen women, all of whom work in the same school district as administrators but at different levels of the hierarchy. This group focused explicitly on the development of a personal and professional support system with one another. It is called the Women in Management Group.

The second effort involved a smaller group of six women principals from different school systems. They developed an instrument, The Principal Effectiveness Survey, for use with their individual staffs as one method of determining how effectively they administer their schools. The task of developing the instrument was explicit; implicit in the design was the formation of a personal and professional support mechanism.

This paper offers an examination of the two groups of women managers: an intra-district and a cross-district group, each with different tasks but both with an emphasis on forming support systems. In addition to the

two female groups, LLC also conducted a cross-district male group whose task was the development of a similar effectiveness survey instrument. We are able, therefore, in the second part of this paper, to offer some impressionistic comparisons of the male and female groups.

The data on which we base the examination of each group differ in the two settings. In the Women in Management Group the data is largely of a process nature. The group met bi-monthly for a year and a half (and continues to meet). LLC recorded the dialogue and underlying issues of each meeting, analyzed and wrote up the issues, appended some comments and mailed a report to each member prior to the next meeting. These 20 detailed reports and the audio tapes and notes on which they were based form the basis for the review of the intra-district Women in Management Group which constitutes Part I of this paper.

The information generated by the cross-district Principal Effectiveness Survey Groups is more varied. While the groups were meeting bi-monthly during the development of their surveys, LLC documented those meetings in a similar manner to that described above. Once the process of utilizing the survey began, fewer group meetings were held as LLC became involved in distributing the questionnaire, interviewing each of the principals, interviewing a set of randomly selected faculty in each school, collating and analyzing the data from the questionnaires, and providing each of the staffs with feedback information regarding their leader. In addition, therefore, to documentation of the group meetings, LLC has as its data base for the discussion of the Principal Effectiveness Survey Groups (Part II of this paper) the leadership cases developed by

each group of principals, information from some 80 in-depth interviews of both leaders and staffs, the raw questionnaire data from each faculty member in 14 schools, the LLC compilations and reports on each of the 14 leaders, and impressions of staff reaction to the LLC presentation of the feedback information in each of the schools. Furthermore, since both a male and a female group of principals developed and utilized surveys, there is the added suggestive data arising from tentative comparisons of the two groups of leaders.

As should be obvious from the foregoing introduction, the nature of LLC's work is highly process-oriented. The kind of action research reported here is therefore of an impressionistic and qualitative sort. Furthermore, the two efforts discussed below are not complete. They continue, and they continue to generate data. Our analyses must of necessity be tentative and exploratory. Harder, more quantitative analyses will have to await further work. What we offer in the ensuing paper is not a piece of finished research but rather an opportunity to share with us in what has been a fascinating exploration of how a total of 22 women in two different settings (and 8 men in still another setting) engaged in professional support groups and apparently found the outcomes of their group interactions helpful in improving their job effectiveness.

PART I: THE WOMEN IN MANAGEMENT GROUP (INTRA-DISTRICT)

In the fall of 1975, LLC asked a woman principal in a nearby district if she and other women administrators would like to form a group to examine common issues and concerns. LLC had previously worked with this particular woman and knew she was influential with her colleagues because of her

skill and personal warmth. She called a number of women who expressed reserved interest, and considerable concern that such a venture would be misinterpreted by male colleagues as "feminist militancy." LLC and she encouraged the women to come to one meeting before making a final decision one way or the other.

At the first meeting, many women spoke of their concerns. They did not wish to further alienate male colleagues. They wondered how others would view their participation in such a venture. LLC encouraged them to role-play how members might talk about a women's group to their colleagues. Several principals shared their annoyance at how they were treated by male counterparts in their regular staff meetings. At the end of the meeting, a feeling of tentative commitment had developed and the group voted to begin meeting regularly.

Various levels of the district hierarchy were represented in this group: elementary principals, secondary vice-principals, directors of Special Education, Guidance, Health Services, Personnel, Home Economics, Library, Kindergarten Center, etc. All the women supervised a staff, or were a "singleton" with administrative responsibilities but no staff.

The meetings had open agendas; generally a member raised an issue of current concern. LLC attempted to focus on specific practice, and to help members talk about how they actually perform their jobs, rather than describe their work philosophically or in abstractions. Listening to others was emphasized from the perspective of <u>not</u> giving advice, <u>not</u> correcting, and <u>not</u> reassuring. Rather, LLC asked members to be resources to each other, and to allow the presenter to attempt to solve her own

problem. The leadership was informal; the group met in different schools with different members as hosts for the sessions.

In the early meetings, the group spent time getting to know one another. Elementary principals and secondary administrators were virtual strangers to one another. Most of the women were unaccustomed to meeting with other women in a professional setting. Some of the women, especially those from secondary schools, had trouble leaving their buildings during school hours. Although their male counterparts regularly left their buildings to attend meetings, women had been expected to "keep the home fires burning." Several times during the year, the group appealed directly to the superintendent for some words of public approval. Although he had given private encouragement to the venture, and was, in general, very supportive of women administrators, he had to be urged to make his support visible so that it would not be questioned by the male secondary principals.

An early issue which the women raised was the behavior of males in the regular principals' meetings. According to the women, it was customary in their district for the males to sit at one end of the room, leaving the opposite end to the females. When a female spoke, some of the males would begin their own conversation, ignoring the speaker with either conscious or unconscious rudeness. In relating these incidents, one female principal, both senior and widely respected in the system, said, "I get so mad when they do this that I just have to leave the room and walk around by myself for awhile." After the female principals shared their feelings of anger and resentment concerning this behavior, they were able to develop new strategies. One such strategy which they evolved

and put into action involved the following: they arrived early at the meeting, scattered themselves around the table in such a way as to separate the males, and verbally reprimanded any male who talked while a woman was speaking. The strategy worked. Not only did the women report an improvement in the quality of their meetings, but they also related that the men confirmed this.

Another early discussion concerned how the women felt they lacked an information pipeline and a political network. One principal described typical behavior on the morning following a School Committee meeting (in Massachusetts, elected School Boards are called School Committees):

> Every women principal arrives at her school early and immediately begins the usual pre-school activities: talking with teachers and students, returning parents' phone calls, discussing the day's activities with the secretary. Every male principal goes immediately to his office, closes the door, and phones another male principal to discuss the latest news about the School Committee's decisions of the previous evening.

The women agreed that they often lost out in not having immediate information about the School Committee decisions, the salary negotiations, and job openings. They decried their lack of a network and developed two strategies. One was to initiate their own telephone network; another was to attempt to insert themselves into the males' network.

In still another situation, the Director of Home Economics described how she shares her office with four male colleagues who customarily go out to lunch together every Friday noon, often saying goodbye to her, but neglecting to invite her to join them. This type of behavior appeared to be quite common to many of the "singletons" and was described as difficult to overcome. The group suggested several strategies; the Director

experimented with a number of them, but finally decided to organize her own Friday lunch party with her friends. By so doing, she now feels that the issue has become something about which she can exercise choice rather than be the recipient of the males' rejection.

By the middle of the year, the group members revealed the following behavior: difficult shared issues were discussed in such a way that members revealed their immediate and automatic reactions to specific occurrences and were willing to examine the assumptions they held about themselves and others that produced the initial reactions. The concept of a legitimate range of differing responses became accepted as they came to understand how differently each of them viewed the world. This in turn led to the notion of alternative strategies. The alternatives were then tried out in the group setting, usually through role-playing, and the group was able to test the appropriateness of alternative behaviors with each other. They then reported that they were able effectively to carry out the agreed-upon new strategies in their home district settings.

We interpret this sequence of group behavior as evidence of effective personal and professional support. The perceptions of the participants corroborated its importance as they said that they felt themselves moving from feelings of helplessness and frustration to thinking for the first time about (1) identifying who really owns the problem, (2) designing appropriate alternative strategies, and (3) testing alternative responses before acting on the problem.

Additional evidence of effective support came from the growing practice of individuals using the group as a vehicle in which to examine their own behavior in other administrative settings. These individuals would demonstrate their actions (through role-playing) and then discuss their individual perspectives. They then asked the group members whether or not they saw the behavior as appropriate and successful. As a result of

taking these risks and receiving the feedback, the individuals who used the forum to examine their behavior said they began to take more assertive stances in settings where they had previously felt dominated and unheard.

Furthermore, in responding to individual initiatives for confirming or disconfirming feedback, the other women in the group said that they learned more about how effectively to offer support in groups. They later indicated that, as a consequence, they found themselves better able to be supportive in other group settings to both males and females.

Final evidence of the group's effectiveness as a support mechanism can be seen first in the introduction, the next year, of new members who met the original criteria of supervising a staff and/or working as a "singleton." They entered quickly and easily. Secondly, the issues around responding to males disappeared. In their place were concerns about one's professional expertise, about the political polarization of the School Committee and various School Department employees, and about the fact that schools would be closed in the face of falling enrollments. This raised the extremely difficult issue of job security and competition among administrators for the remaining jobs.

From this evidence, LLC judges (1) that this group of female administrators found the creation of a support group useful, (2) they were willing to commit the time and energy to make it work, (3) they were successful in developing alternative strategies for themselves as a group in interacting with their male colleagues, and (4) they were able to create an atmosphere in which individuals could reveal themselves and be supported as they worked through individual work problems.

In one area, however, the Women in Management Group has not yet

proven themselves. While they have begun to identify power issues and conflicts in the school district as a whole, they have not yet been able to bring forth and examine conflicts and power issues among themselves.

Judith D. Palmer, in her article, "Thoughts on Women and Power, or, After Consciousness-Raising, What?", raises a concern about women who have successfully increased their awareness and achieved a "Sisterhood Plateau." For when "their problems have been fully clarified and shared, their anger harnessed, and their support established," they tend not to stray from the comfortable feelings of support to the less comfortable ones around power issues. For "to be powerful -- is to be willing to be responsible for doing something that affects other people." This is where the conflict arises.

Palmer's statement describes where we are currently in the growth of this particular Women in Management group. The women have successfully maintained a personal support base in the midst of an atmosphere of threatened school closings. They have learned how to better deal with the male administrators. But they have yet to confront the conflict which exists among them, conflict between the self-interest of administrators whose jobs are threatened, conflict between the different interpretations of information about the political situation. LLC has attempted to legitimize the feelings of outrage and frustration. We have offered some theoretical formulations regarding power, and have led discussions which began to illuminate the various assumptions that members hold about "manipulation" and "pushiness" and "unfeminine behavior."

Presently the group is at the point of a beginning exploration of conflict and power issues. Only time will tell if the group can move

from all-too-seldom experienced feelings of support to the more difficult ones of conflicting with one's supporters.

This experience in helping initiate and maintain a Women in Management support group -- which the participants and LLC regard as successful -- leads to some tentative hypotheses regarding the formation of such groups. First of all, it seems doubtful that the participants would have formed a support group alone, without the outside intervention of LLC. And it appears equally doubtful that the group could have been started without the active support of a few influential insiders, who were potential members of the group. The forces which isolate women professionally appear also to ridicule women who move toward working with other women. So some fortuitous combination of insider friends and outside legitimate "helpers" appears necessary. Possibly a woman who holds a position of high status in the district, for example, an Assistant Superintendent or a School Board member, could initiate a women's support group without outside assistance.

Secondly, once organized, it appears that some powerful spokesperson within the district is needed to legitimize the group meetings as a professional in-service activity. In this case, the superintendent was needed to force secondary principals to release women administrators during in-school hours. The norms in this district were clear and powerful. Men may join together during work hours for professional growth and development; women must remain in their buildings to maintain the operation of the school. This suggests that the old ethos of "men go

to work, women stay home" has transferred itself from the home to the work place.

Thirdly, it is not clear at this point in the group's work whether they can move from their plateau of personal support to an examination of confrontation and power issues. It seems reasonably clear that they will not do so without the help of outsiders. The norms against conflict, against honest confrontation, against "rocking the boat," are powerful and pervasive. Most male principals honor these norms; most female principals do also. And those who don't are often cut off from what meager support systems do exist within any school system.

But it is LLC's view that personal and professional support systems, without some honest and open sharing of difficult, conflictual and possibly negative feelings and information, will tend not to mature to their highest potentials. As a way of exploring these tentative hypotheses, we have formulated and would like to explore the following questions:

-- Are there examples in other parts of the country of intra-district personal and professional support systems for women administrators?

-- Are "insiders" able to form such groups without outside "helpers"? What conditions are necessary?

-- If such a group cannot secure upper administrative legitimization, can it stay underground and remain effective?

-- Are there other ways for such a group to become "legitimate"?

-- Are useful functions performed over time by a group which maintains a level of non-conflictual support?

-- Do group members who have experienced support feel the need to develop skills around confronting?

-- Are there significant differences in the tasks and processes that groups of women would attend to as contrasted with groups of men?

PART II: THE PRINCIPAL EFFECTIVENESS SURVEY GROUPS (CROSS-DISTRICT)

The theme of professional isolation stands out as the one which administrators have focused most upon during LLC's four years of working with them. The first part of this paper examined how women leaders formed and used a personal and professional support group to overcome some of the results of being isolated from colleagues. This section will look at how school leaders, first men and then women, joined to obtain information from their staff about their individual performances in their jobs.

The reasoning that leads to a linkage between isolation and information is based on a number of assumptions: (1) that administrators want to improve their performance, (2) that it is difficult to assess and alter one's behavior without a base of trustworthy information about that behavior, (3) that the isolation of administrators makes it difficult for them to obtain valid information about their performance, and, (4) that their isolation also makes it difficult for them deliberately to test their perceptions and seek confirming or disconfirming responses.

The professional isolation of administrators makes it difficult for them to get valid information from anyone, staff or supporters; this becomes obvious when we note that whatever information principals receive usually comes from strong supporters or strong critics. Normally the school leaders cannot test the frequency nor the reliability of either positive or negative statements. Without validation of the data, school leaders do not know what to do with the information they do receive, and they simultaneously lack the kind of information they need to assess

and improve their effectiveness. And without valid information to confirm or disconfirm their own perceptions of their effectiveness, school leaders find it difficult to change their behaviors.

During the 1975-76 school year, LLC attempted to test their perception of this need of school leaders for better information about their effectiveness by offering a group for principals entitled, "Learning About Your Performance as a Leader." Members of this group would, in the words of the LLC prospectus:

-- design an instrument to collect information from the faculty about each particular principal's performance;
-- administer the instrument;
-- analyze the data;
-- select specific areas for study and improvement.

Initially, we envisioned (1) some form of questionnaire which teachers could complete, (2) some interviewing of staff and principals, (3) a collation of the data with appropriate feedback sessions, and (4) some kind of group work which would take advantage of the findings. LLC knew this particular activity was unfamiliar. In fact, it ran against the norms in most school districts where teachers are not asked to evaluate principals. For this reason, we expected that the proposed activity would attract secure and experienced principals. We did not anticipate that it would attract only male principals.

Eight male principals joined. During the fall they met; LLC attempted to structure the meetings so that they could begin to tell one another about their specific practice: the ways in which they performed in the many jobs of the principalship. We found that they had great difficulty in moving from philosophical statements and abstract descriptions of their work to real and concrete statements about how they responded to specific

problems. They had little experience in sharing the details of their jobs with one another; they had little common knowledge about how other principals manage tasks. If we assume that a real understanding of alternative ways to handle parents, or discipline students, or run faculty meetings would help a principal re-examine his own practices and perhaps try some new behaviors, then the principals with whom LLC met were isolated from the kinds of information which they needed in order to improve their effectiveness. They were politically astute and aware, but they lacked safe environments of trusted colleagues in which to reveal their assumptions, describe their actions, and receive feedback about their effectiveness.

By late January, LLC and the principals had designed a format for the questionnaire, chosen the categories which would give them the information they wanted, and written eight short cases, each describing a specific work situation. For example, the principals wanted information about how effectively they evaluated teachers. The case to elicit this information read:

> Your principal visited you last week for a regularly scheduled evaluation visit and observed for forty minutes. When the principal left the room, you sensed he was not pleased.

In order to record both how teachers saw the principal's actual performance as an evaluator and also how teachers idealized an effective evaluator, teacher/respondants were asked:

> How would your principal respond? What would he do?
>
> How would you like your principal to respond? What would you like him to do?

Principals and their staffs took responsibility for the distribution and collection of completed surveys. Each staff person was requested to

complete the questionnaire; confidentiality was guaranteed by LLC.

Nancy Reiner Zimmerman, the LLC Documentarian, interviewed a random sample of staff in each school and collated the information along with the questionnaire responses. LLC's approach to the collation of the material was based on the same assumptions that governed the initial activity: (1) that each principal was committed to his own learning and growth, and (2) that feedback, both positive and negative, is essential information to support individual learning and growth. A numerical count of staff who shared similar opinions about the principal was provided, so that principals could realize the strength of common responses. Unique and idiosyncratic responses were not stressed out of proportion to their appearance on the data. An example, using part of one feedback report, but with the principal's name deleted, follows:

> In general, there seems to be a great deal of interest and energy in the responses to the question describing an evaluation situation. Seven teachers indicated that they thought Mr. X would say nothing at the time of the observation, but leave them a note in their mailbox. Several teachers felt that the note would include a statement about the observation and a request for them to see him at a specific time in his office. Other teachers envisioned the secretary telling them Mr. X wanted to see them, or Mr. X commenting on the lesson and setting up a meeting if problems were evident.
>
> A majority of the staff expressed the wish for more immediate direct feedback, both positive and negative. One teacher stated, "It seems very hard for Mr. X to face you with a compliment or a criticism. He may leave a personal note in your box saying, 'good job,' but I wish he could say it to me directly." Another teacher noted, "In evaluation he looks for positive things in teachers and kids. For him to say negative things to staff is very difficult."
>
> A common feeling expressed was an appreciation for the "freedom to act" that Mr. X gives teachers. One teacher commented, "Although I appreciate the freedom to act, I feel a lack because he's not involved in the day-to-day routine." She added, "I think he would help me if I went to him, but he doesn't take the initiative."

After the interviews, the collation process and reports were complete, LLC led feedback sessions with each faculty and principal. Although some faculties had initially shown anxiety and some resistance, they all responded positively to the data and to the presentation. There was considerable relief that their negative statements were presented in context and that information had been treated both respectfully and confidentially. These feedback sessions resulted in faculties and their principals beginning to talk with one another about issues which had previously been off-limits, in ways which were new and which provided valid information for both.

LLC examined all eight survey results for similarities which had emerged from the staffs in the eight schools, and reported these to all the principals. We also asked what characteristics distinguish this particular survey from other leadership evaluation efforts. The principals responded with some of the following attributes which they judged significant:

-- The principals' voluntary participation in a group designed to help them examine their own practice; the emphasis on speaking concretely, not abstractly, about their practice;

-- The joint work to develop the survey items; the relevance of the items to their situations; the allowed-for discrepancy between what they actually did, and what teachers wished they would do;

-- The careful introduction of the survey by the principal to his staff; the guarantee of confidentiality;

-- The unbiased third party to interview randomly selected teachers, to collate the data, and present the feedback;

-- The opportunity for staff and principal to hear, respond to, confirm and thus feel that they owned the data.

Even as we were completing the year with the eight male principals, an idea began germinating -- why not undertake the same survey activity with women principals. We asked ourselves some questions: would women

repeat the same process? In a new cross-district group, would they share the same problems around revealing themselves? the same anxieties about presenting staffs with a "personal" questionnaire? Would they identify the same leadership issues for the survey "cases"? Would the faculties in schools headed by women administrators respond in the same ways as those led by male administrators?

We knew we could not conduct a strictly comparable study. The small number of female principals compared to male principals in our possible population meant that there was no way to match male and female principals from different districts, with different size schools, with different leadership styles and experiences. Furthermore, since LLC was repeating the previous study rather than initiating the two side-by-side, we assumed that LLC's participation in the second group would undoubtedly be affected by the learnings from the initial experience. We were confident, however, that some gross similarities and differences would emerge for further inquiry. And we were interested to observe if and how the women might begin to offer personal and professional support to one another in a task-oriented setting.

In the fall of 1976, LLC approached eight women in seven Greater Boston school districts, talked to them about the possible formation of a group to develop a survey to test their effectiveness. We invited them to an informational meeting. Some of the women already knew about the survey; enthusiastic male colleagues had told them about their experiences of the previous year. They were eager to come. Others, however, were less eager. They felt they had too much to do already. They did not know if they could afford the time. They did not know if they

really needed the information, the aggravation, the responsibility of adding a new burden to their already overloaded teachers. However, six principals came to the information meeting, and six decided to commit the necessary time and energy. Of the six, only two principals from the same district already knew one another. In fact, these two principals were members of the Women in Management Group, described earlier.

Three of the female principals worked in districts with a good ratio of female to male principals. Two, however, were alone in their districts with no female peers; one principal had one other female peer.

We initiated the group process by asking each member to tell us how she got her job as a principal:

> "Well, once I discovered that it really had nothing to do with my qualifications, my competency, myself as a person, or any of that -- it didn't matter. All that mattered was getting four out of the seven (School Committee) votes."

> "I'm very sure they took me because I'm a woman. They were at the point where they had systematically appointed men, and I'm convinced that's why the superintendent took the chance. I was <u>not</u> the first choice of any group which interviewed me along the way."

> "I was interviewed by the School Committee; I remember one of the fellows whom I had known came out to me while I was waiting and said, 'Are you sure you want to go into this interview? I really don't think you want a job as an administrator.'"

> "Thinking back over my career of getting into administration, most everything I've done I've done by being aggressive, or pushy and unfeminine."

This beginning topic proved to be most successful as a way to engage participants as it gave the women an opportunity to share both their history and useful information about how they reacted to similar events. Several women related similar incidents: being chosen and supported by a male mentor, or fighting their way through the political procedures

which guaranteed women a harder fight than their male counterparts. It quickly became apparent that this was a group of superior women administrators who had learned how to compete successfully with the males in their districts, and who were both sophisticated and inventive in their particular administrative practices. We were not dealing with inexperienced or insecure women.

They soon began to share the specifics of their jobs, their actual day-to-day practices. They shared feelings -- those of satisfaction, or despair, or frustration, or fun -- as well as facts about their jobs. They discovered they had formed immediate and sometimes disparaging impressions of others in the group who were unknown, and often had these impressions shattered when the particular woman shared her experiences and expertise. They remarked that it was quite unusual to meet with women and to tell other women administrators the successes and failures of any given day. They talked about feeling less isolated and alone, and began openly to look forward to the meetings.

In fact, they could probably have gone on all year meeting every two weeks, sharing the day-to-day practices, thinking about new perspectives, learning how to be resources to women peers, and increasing their skill and pleasure in supporting one another. LLC had to assume considerable responsibility to get the women to move toward thinking about the survey, how it would look, what the cases would consist of, and how they could introduce the idea to their faculties.

To compare the two groups' processes leads to the observation that the males had difficulty with the process of entering the group as full participants and with sharing the specifics of their jobs. They initially

talked in generalities and made policy-level statements or philosophical statements about leadership. They also tended to vie for leadership in the group. Some behaved competitively; others withdrew. They also appeared not to enjoy listening to each other, but rather to be formulating what they were going to say while someone else was talking. But several males took much responsibility for attending to the task of developing the survey instrument.

The women made a speedy and pleasurable entry and shared at a concrete level immediately. They enjoyed listening to each other and often asked clarifying questions which extended the speaker's time. They did not appear to compete with each other for leadership, and they did not initiate work on the task. Once into the task, the women worked hard and efficiently.

The two groups developed the cases differently. The men's group began by identifying those categories in which they wanted information about their performance. The categories tended to cluster in what could be called the "classic" administrative areas, namely: supervising and evaluating teachers, disciplining students and teachers, asserting authority and demonstrating responsibility. Cases were then written to illustrate the particular category; the best case was chosen by group consensus. The discussions concerning these selections revealed that the men talked from the perspective of "How do central office and parents see me performing certain tasks?" They appeared to be most interested in the opinions of those persons outside the school.

The women's group, on the other hand, did not initially choose categories and then provide the case. Rather they shared events in their recent experience which left them curious -- curious about how teachers felt about the principal's behavior. They were less concerned with the

perceptions of those outside the building, and more with the feelings of those inside, namely the teachers. They also focused less on tasks and more on their own behavior in given situations. They asked:

How do teachers feel when I as principal make a unilateral decision;
How do teachers feel when I as principal reach the end of my rope;
How do teachers feel about my priorities for in-school time.

This emphasis on staff perceptions meant that the women were frequently concerned with how to resolve interpersonal dilemmas with their teachers in areas such as mediating between groups of teachers with opposing philosophies, dealing with rumors, meeting teachers' expectations of a "good" faculty meeting. It might be safe to venture that the women's involvement in how their teachers were responding to current situations helped define for the women the areas of administrative performance which they deemed as important, while the men's definition of effective performance tended to be less responsive to current situations and more in line with pre-determined areas of leadership like decision-making and authority.

A comparison of the cases chosen by the men and women for the survey indicates that they have four similar concerns: (1) evaluating teachers, (2) disciplining students, (3) transferring a student from one teacher's class to another, and (4) asserting the authority of the school with parents. The men's survey also included cases around providing professional support to staff through in-service activities, providing materials for teachers, managing a conflict with a teacher regarding the written evaluation, and reprimanding a teacher. The women's survey included cases about honoring commitments to teachers, disclosing information appropriately, and providing leadership to manage a concern raised by faculty. In addition, one woman suggested an open-ended question, "What do you value most about your principal? What would you most like to change about your principal?"

With respect to the anxiety principals experienced in introducing the survey to their staffs, most male principals were able to share their

anxious feelings only when alone with an LLC staff person. Some were concerned about the possibility that the survey might be interpreted by others as threatening the principal or as indicating weakness in the principal's leadership. Others were concerned and anxious about negative feedback from individual staff persons concerning their performance. For every principal had at least one "enemy." The same principals who shared their concerns with LLC in a private session had great difficulty in talking about their fears in the group context.

One principal said retrospectively (at our summer "reunion"):

> I think we all knew, we all expected, that in the feedback we we were going to hear some good things about ourselves and some not so good things, too. We have certain staff people who think that we're good and some staff people who think we're pretty stupid ...

Another principal was more succinct: "I knew I could get killed."

When the issue of possible anxiety was introduced in the women's group, they were immediately able to talk about their concerns in the group. They separated the concerns into several categories: how the principal would introduce the idea of the survey, how the teachers might react, how they could allay teachers' fears. One woman role-played how she planned to introduce the survey to her faculty advisory committee; others critiqued the presentation. Others gave comments from teachers which recognized the principals' risk in being involved in such a venture, which envisioned the feedback sessions as tense for principals and faculties, and which expressed concern that randomly selected faculty interviews might represent the "oddballs" on the faculty.

Two of the women principals even identified additional causes for anxiety. One assumed that her faculty response to her introduction of the idea of

the survey would indicate the degree of their trust in her, and their desire for her to learn and grow in the job. Another said, "I don't know if they will answer honestly. They may not like everything I do, but they may not want me to change."

These observations by the women are interesting in that LLC has learned that the principal's presentation of the survey to the faculty is critical to the quality of survey information which teachers provide. In those schools where principals were unclear about their purpose for initiating the survey, about how the survey was intended for, about who would have access to the data, and why they were involved, the teachers responded in less complete form. The richness and complexity of the data corresponded directly to the clarity and articulateness of the principal's original statement to his/her faculty regarding his/her involvement in the survey group

With respect to the function of the group as a setting for the survey activity, both males and females attested to the importance of receiving personal and professional support and spoke often of their enormous satisfaction in being in a group which offered support.

Finally, the reception of the survey among the faculties of both male and female-led schools prove similar. Both males and females, in the course of presenting the survey to their faculties, discovered some resistance, much acceptance, and considerable "protectionist" behavior from teachers. The longer the principal had been in the building, the more concerned the staff was about giving the principal negative feedback. Teachers offered reassurance, "I didn't write anything I couldn't have said to your face." They offered advice, "I think this is a really risky thing for you to do; maybe you should ..." Many offered to say nothing negative or potentially hurtful about their leader.

In summary, some differences between the groups appear to be:

Males initially shared generalities, policy-level statements or philosophical statements about how they offer leadership. Females immediately shared specific information about how they respond in a specific situation. "This is what I do when ..."

Males did not enjoy listening to each other in the same way the females did. Males appeared to be busy formulating what they were going to say while someone else was speaking. Females enjoyed listening to one another.

Males were concerned about the task purpose of the group and several individuals took responsibility for keeping the group focused on the development of the survey. Females relished meeting in the group with other competent females. They offered each other support, enthusiasm, and empathy, but they did not take leadership responsibility for moving the group into the task.

Males vied for leadership in the group. Some behaved competitively, others withdrew. Females did not vie for leadership. They behaved cooperatively and looked to LLC for leadership.

Regarding the preparation of the survey cases, the concerns which males discussed revolved around how others, i.e., central office and parents, see them in their jobs. They selected "classic" administration areas to survey. Women were more concerned with how teachers would view their leadership in the school, and with interpersonal dilemmas and "disharmony" with teachers. These concerns tended to guide the selection of their cases.

Prior to adminstering the survey, males had difficulty in discussing their feelings of anxiety and concern in the group. They did not use the

group to rehearse how they would introduce the survey to their faculties. LLC had to assume the major responsibility for raising questions about how principals would attend to the specific details of collecting the surveys, guaranteeing confidentiality, maintaining reports within schools, etc. Males did raise concerns individually with LLC around whether "others" would see them as weak, or risky for embarking upon this venture, and around negative feedback from particular staff persons. Females talked more readily about their anxiety surrounding the introduction and administration of the survey. They took more responsibility for the many details around administering the survey. They welcomed the chance to rehearse presentations and receive feedback about their performance.

As a result of the experience of conducting both survey groups, it does appear to us that one way for both women and men to overcome the isolated nature of administrative jobs is to devise a means of obtaining valid information regarding their effectiveness. Any administrator could initiate a survey, a questionnaire, or some more open-ended framework and could collect data -- not only from teachers, but potentially also from parents, students and/or central office administrators. However, we believe that the impartiality and confidentiality which an outsider can guarantee is critical; thus the administrators must develop some internal system to guarantee the information is collated fairly, respectfully, and confidentially. In our experience, it is not easy for those who work in a system to find an impartial insider. The forces which keep administrators isolated are also those which make impartiality difficult. Therefore, the role of an outsider may be as important here as it was in the creation of the Women in Management Group.

And again, as in the case of the Women in Management Group, it may be necessary for a senior administrator to propose and legitimize both the administrative survey and the formation of an in-service, in-school-hours group to develop, administer, and collate the survey and ensuing information. To attempt such a survey alone could provide individual administrators with good information but little peer support, while doing the survey with peers seems to provide both valid information and a support system in which to be helped in making sense of the new information and in trying out new forms of administrative behavior.

CONCLUSION

Isolation has been repeatedly identified by school administrators as a major issue. By isolation they appear to mean a number of things: the absence of knowledgeable people to talk to about the details of one's job, the inability to admit you do not know something you need to know for fear you will be judged incompetent, and the lack of trustworthy feedback about your effectiveness.

If isolation is indeed a primary issue for all school administrators, it is particularly so for the minority of women who presently hold administrative positions in our nation's schools. Two mechanisms which appear useful to participants in breaking down some of the barriers of isolation are:

(1) personal and professional support groups whose function is the provision of support from knowledgable colleagues who hold similar jobs.

(2) Information gathering groups whose explicit task is to generate valid information about individuals' administrative effectiveness and whose implicit function is to offer personal and professional support in the process of gathering the information and reacting to it.

LLC's preliminary work, reported here, in developing and managing these two mechanisms designed to combat administrative isolation tentatively suggests a reliance on two significant factors:

-- the availability of an outside facilitator and the funds to support it.

-- the acceptance, approval, and visible legitimization of the administrative hierarchy of the isolation-breaking activities.

Unfortunately, these factors cannot be assumed automatically to be available to school administrators, especially in a time of falling enrollments, dwindling resources and increasing competition among administrators for the remaining resources and even for jobs. These conditions make new ventures difficult but they also emphasize the importance of improved administrative effectiveness. When an institution is in trouble, its leaders need to be especially competent in their purposes and practices. It is, therefore, becoming increasingly important that educational administrators receive the support they need in order to learn new responses to changing conditions.

What is presented in this paper suggests the directions for two models of support mechanisms which can help increase administrative effectiveness. Hopefully other models also exist. The experience in other parts of the country ought to be examined for different mechanisms for accomplishing these purposes, research findings should be explored regarding the experience of administrators in non-educational settings to combat isolation and improve effectiveness, and groups of educational leaders might attempt to develop their own models for providing themselves with the peer support and the kind of reliable performance feedback that permits them to break down some of the barriers of administrative isolation and to increase their personal and professional effectiveness.